

## 2 Project Background

Washington has often been described as two cities; the official “Monumental” city of government buildings and monuments and the National Mall, and the rest of the city experienced daily by residents and workers. Recent planning efforts have been undertaken to reconnect these two cities under a single vision of a “World Capital.” Plans have been developed for both the Monumental Core and the traditional downtown that would connect the two through new developments and new transportation links. Several recent development plans and transportation studies have been produced that provide a vision and a transportation framework in which a downtown circulator would be implemented. Current downtown transit services serve as a backdrop for a new downtown circulation system. This section reviews these relevant plans and existing services.

### 2.1 Development Plans

In 1997, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) presented a bold vision for future development of the Monumental Core. *Extending the Legacy – Planning America’s Capital for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>1</sup> is described as a “framework for change” in the capital city. It presents a plan to re-center the Monumental Core on the US Capitol, developing the North, East, and South Capitol Street areas with new monuments, museums, and institutions. It proposes a transportation system focused on public transit connections and the elimination of elevated highway and rail links. Multiple transit centers in the core would connect the rail and bus network with new water transportation services on both rivers and a new downtown circulation system. The proposed circulation system would cover the current Monumental Core between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial but also extend out North, East, and South Capitol Streets and extend to Georgetown, Arlington Cemetery, and East Potomac Park.

While “*Legacy*” focused on expanding the Monumental Core and integrating that expansion with the development of the rest of the city, in 2000 the District of Columbia’s Office of Planning produced an action plan for managing the development of the traditional downtown area north of the Mall. The *Downtown Action Agenda*<sup>2</sup> provides direction for future growth and development downtown. It proposes to strengthen the ten distinct neighborhoods within the downtown area, emphasizing the unique characteristics of each. It identifies key sites and corridors for development of housing, hotels, retail, and arts and entertainment facilities. New office development is directed eastward toward Union Station, while the area north of Massachusetts Avenue is identified for residential development. The plan envisions a focus of downtown at Gallery Place, with east-west commercial development along F Street, and a north-south retail, arts, and entertainment corridor along 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The 7<sup>th</sup> Street corridor would connect the National Mall with the convention center, retail, and hotel district under development at Mt.

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<sup>1</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, *Extending the Legacy - Planning America’s Capital for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Government of the District of Columbia, Office of Planning, *Downtown Action Agenda*, November 2000

Vernon Square. The plan endorses the 1999 Downtown BID Downtown Circulator plan (discussed later in this section) which places circulator routes along these two corridors. It also endorses a “park once” policy for downtown visitors in which visitors will be able to access both the downtown area and the Monumental Core via transit without moving their car.

### **2.2 Transportation and Security Plans**

Recent transportation plans have also stressed the need to connect the downtown and the Monumental Core. In the District of Columbia’s transportation plan<sup>3</sup>, a transportation vision is presented that sees the District as a World Capital, a center for tourism - but also a vibrant place to work and live. The plan endorses public transit as an alternative to driving into the city and to driving within the city. It proposes to focus transit investment on internal circulation to provide city residents with an alternative to the automobile. The District’s action plan<sup>4</sup> presents a 6 year plan for transportation investment. It presents a “Current Assumptions Scenario” extrapolating current rates of investment and advocates an “Enhanced Scenario” for transportation improvements. The Enhanced Scenario includes new circulator services in the downtown area including a National Mall Shuttle and a 7<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Street Shuttle.

Security around government facilities in the District was an issue even before September 11<sup>th</sup>. The NCPC Interagency Security Task Force was formed in 2000 and produced a report entitled *Designing for Security in the Nation’s Capital*<sup>5</sup>. While the Task Force was initially formed to address the future of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, the report also recommends the preparation of a plan integrating urban design and security concerns for the entire Monumental Core. It recommended that NCPC undertake planning and concept design for streetscape, landscape and security throughout the core in order to guarantee a unified approach and avoid piecemeal actions. (An urban design and security plan was subsequently completed in October, 2002.) With regard to Pennsylvania Avenue, the task force report recommends that the street remain restricted from full traffic but that it be improved into a landscaped civic space that would not preclude the reopening of the street. It recommends that a circulator service be implemented using this section of Pennsylvania Avenue in order to partially restore this cross-town travel link and to provide visitors and residents the experience of riding in front of the White House. Additional traffic management alternatives are recommended and are analyzed in a separate document<sup>6</sup>.

### **2.3 Monumental Core and Downtown Circulation Plans**

Circulation within the Monumental Core and the Downtown has been studied from the perspective of both areas. The National Park Service undertook a study in 1997, and is currently in the midst of a new study, to examine transportation needs and alternatives in the Monumental

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<sup>3</sup> Government of the District of Columbia, Department of Public Works, *A Transportation Vision , Strategy, and Action Plan for the Nation’s Capital*, March 1997

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation and the District of Columbia Department of Public Works, *Transportation in a World Class Capital: Multimodal Transportation Needs and Candidate Actions and Investments*, (not dated)

<sup>5</sup> Interagency Task Force of the National Capital Planning Commission, *Designing for Security in the Nation’s Capital*, October 2001

<sup>6</sup> Parsons Transportation Group, prepared for National Capital Planning Commission, *Pennsylvania Avenue Traffic Alternatives Analysis, Final Report*, October 2001

Core. The Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) produced a study in 1999 proposing a Circulator system for downtown. They have since expanded the proposal to include more of the Monumental Core and the White House. The circulator routes contained in the recent Downtown BID proposal and those proposed in the 1997 study commissioned by the Park Service are shown in Figure 2-1. The current Park Service study has not yet resulted in any specific recommendations for visitor transportation services. Each of these studies is discussed below.

The 1997 transportation study commissioned by the National Park Service<sup>7</sup> addresses vehicle circulation, parking, pedestrian movements, bicycle facilities, and visitor facility needs in the Monumental Core. It also investigates how visitor transportation systems can play an expanded role in the core while improving the visitor experience.

The study recommends a new visitor transportation system that would replace the current Tourmobile, a service operated under a concession agreement with the Park Service that expires in 2005. The study proposes a three-loop system, shown in Figure 2-1, with one loop operating between Union Station and the Washington Monument, a second operating between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, and a third operating between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. Each loop would include stops at several key visitor locations. All services would be frequent and charge a low fare in order to attract a larger market share than the current service. The services would operate eleven hours a day, every five to ten minutes, using accessible low floor buses with a capacity of 50 people. The study calculated the capacity and cost of such a service but did not attempt to project ridership.

A key recommendation of the 1997 study is that a visitor transportation system should rely on Metrorail for access to the core. An option to expand parking and provide a shuttle bus service to the monuments was rejected as inconsistent with NCPC's long range plans.

The Park Service is currently engaged in a new process to examine visitor transportation service. They are now in the midst of a visioning process to determine the visitor services that should be offered when the current Tourmobile concession expires. They are considering several service options including service for visitors who just want to get around between the most popular sites on the Mall, as well as those who want an interpretive service. They are also considering excursion service to outlying sites. In addition to serving visitor needs, the Park Service is considering ways to increase its visibility and identity. Several service options are being studied, including opportunities for partnerships. A consultant is doing a demand analysis and an analysis of visitor needs. The Park Service expects to generate alternatives and enter into an environmental review process in 2003.

The Downtown BID has also been developing plans for a circulator system that would include service to the downtown as well as to the Monumental Core. In 1999, the BID produced a report detailing a proposed Downtown Circulator<sup>8</sup>. The BID proposal, including later modifications to include the White House and additional monuments, is shown in Figure 2-1. (The original 1999 proposal did not include service west of 14<sup>th</sup> Street.) The original BID proposal consisted of a

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<sup>7</sup> BRW, Inc. and Lee Engineering, *Final Draft Transportation Study, Memorial Core, Washington, DC*, December 1997

<sup>8</sup> Parsons Transportation Group, prepared for the Downtown Business Improvement District, *Technical Report for a Downtown Circulator in Washington, DC*, April 1999

two route system. One route would be a north-south route on 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets connecting the new convention center to the National Mall. The second would be a two-way loop route using F Street downtown (later moved to E Street) and serving Union Station, 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Independence Avenue, and the Mall, before returning to downtown on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. This second route was later expanded to encircle the White House and make use of Pennsylvania Avenue. The portion of this route between Union Station and the Washington Monument would essentially duplicate the easternmost loop of the 1997 proposal for the Park Service. The two routes together reflect the District Office of Planning's Downtown Action Plan goal of development along F Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, with a focus at a newly revitalized Gallery Place.

The Downtown BID's plan calls for a frequent, low-fare service operating nine hours per day using convenient low floor buses. The study analyzed several alternative service frequencies and recommends service every 8 minutes. The service would be targeted to tourists, conventioners, and downtown employees. The study emphasizes the potential benefits of the Circulator as encouraging a more accessible downtown, providing more effective management of tourist sites, increasing economic development, reducing traffic congestion, and improving the image of downtown.

Since the 1999 study, in addition to the changes to the two-way loop route, the Downtown BID has added a proposal for service connecting Georgetown to Downtown and a proposal for a monument loop, similar to the Washington Monument-Lincoln Memorial loop from the 1997 study for the Park Service.

The Park Service and the Downtown BID studies form a useful basis for the current Downtown Circulator Implementation Plan study. However, additional analysis is required to more carefully examine the markets for the service and to develop a more detailed operations plan and estimate of costs.

## ***2.4 Transportation Services in Downtown Washington***

All five Metrorail lines serve the circulator study area, as was shown in Figure 1-1. Service is provided on the Orange and Blue lines from Virginia, through Foggy Bottom and Farragut Square, passing through downtown and the Mall under 12<sup>th</sup> Street, turning east past the Capitol, and continuing on to the eastern part of the District and Prince Georges County. Stations in the circulator area include Foggy Bottom, Farragut West and MacPherson Square (both near the White House), Metro Center (near F and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets NW downtown), Federal Triangle, Smithsonian (which has an entrance on the National Mall near Jefferson Drive and 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW), L'Enfant Plaza (near 7<sup>th</sup> and D Streets SW), Federal Center SW, and Capitol South (on 1<sup>st</sup> Street SE one block south of the Capitol grounds). The Orange and Blue Lines are the only lines that serve Smithsonian, the only Metrorail Station with an entrance directly onto the National Mall. Many of the visitor attractions in the study area are within walking distance of other Orange and Blue Line stations, but most are two or more blocks away.

Service is provided on the Green and Yellow lines under 7<sup>th</sup> Street, connecting to the northeast and southeast sectors of the District, Prince Georges County, and Arlington and Alexandria Virginia. Stations in the circulator area include Mt. Vernon Square (near the new convention center), Gallery Place (near F and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets NW downtown), Archives-Navy Memorial, and L'Enfant Plaza (near 7<sup>th</sup> and D Streets SW). The Green and Yellow Lines pass under the Mall but the nearest stations are two blocks north and south of Madison and Jefferson Drives. Some

downtown and Mall visitor attractions are within walking distance of Green and Yellow Line stations, but most are not.

Service is provided on the Red Line through downtown connecting to the northeast and northwest parts of the District, as well as Montgomery County. Stations in the circulator area include Farragut North (3 blocks from the White House), Metro Center (near F and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets NW downtown), Gallery Place (near F and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets NW downtown), Judiciary Square, and Union Station. The Red line does not serve the Mall, but many downtown visitor attractions are within walking distance, and there is a direct entrance from the Red Line into Union Station.

The five Metrorail lines, in combination, provide good access between the region and most of the circulator study area. (The exception is that Metrorail does not serve the northwestern and southwestern portions of the study area -- Georgetown and the monuments along the Potomac River.) Nevertheless, because the area is covered by five different Metrorail lines, and because many visitor attractions are several blocks from the nearest Metrorail Station, Metrorail is not always convenient for travel from one attraction to another.

Numerous Metrobus routes run through the study area, mostly in either a north-south or east-west direction, connecting the study area to the rest of the District. No bus route currently serves all portions of the project area and bus service to the southwestern portion along the river is limited. Key major bus routes relevant to this study are the Georgia Avenue/7<sup>th</sup> Street Line (passing north-south through the study area along 7<sup>th</sup> Street), the Sibley Hospital-Stadium-Armory Line (passing east-west through the study area on E, 13<sup>th</sup>, and K Streets), the Benning Road-H Street Line (serving H Street and connecting to the eastern part of the District), and the Pennsylvania Avenue Line (passing east-west through the study area on Independence, 7<sup>th</sup>, Pennsylvania, 15<sup>th</sup> and H/I Streets). The Pennsylvania Avenue Line is the only major east-west line serving the Mall. It connects the White House area, parts of downtown, the Federal Triangle, the Mall, and the Capitol.

Numerous federal agencies provide their own shuttle bus service between federal facilities in the study area. These services do not provide commuter connections to Metrorail stations, rather they serve a circulation function enabling federal workers to work and attend meetings at multiple sites. The agencies providing shuttle service in the circulator study area include:

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Interior
- Department of Justice
- Department of State
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Treasury
- General Services Administration
- Environmental Protection Agency

## **Downtown Circulator Implementation Plan**

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- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
- Smithsonian Institution

The Circulator would serve many of the facilities served by these shuttles. It is possible that some of these services could be replaced by the circulator, saving costs for several federal agencies.